

Sugar Does Not Feed Cancer

Recently, millions of people have received an email containing information falsely attributed to Johns Hopkins. The “update” suggests ways of preventing cancer that are false and misleading. This has prompted the REAL Johns Hopkins to post a notice on their website in an attempt to combat the harmful spread of this Hoax (http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/kimmel_cancer_center/news_events/featured/cancer_update_email_it_is_a_hoax.html).

This has misled some patients to radically change their lifestyles in an attempt to prevent or even treat cancer. The most prevalent hoax is that sugar feeds cancer. This claim dates back the 1930’s when studies of metabolism suggested a way to control cancer. The use of metabolic poisons such as cyanide killed both cancer and patient alike, because both normal and cancer cells require glucose. Furthermore, there is no evidence that cancer cells grow any faster in diabetic patients who have higher than normal glucose levels.

Other claims that milk produces mucus that feeds colon cancer cells or that meat based diets promote cancer growth by causing an acid environment are also false. Mucus is a natural substance produced by the body regardless of your intake of milk and does not cause cancer. Also, the body tightly regulates the acid content of the blood to within a few hundredths of a pH unit. Only serious diseases such as kidney failure or overwhelming infection can change this. Unless you have one of these illnesses, you cannot change your body’s acidity with diet. Cancer growth is much more complicated than acid or alkaline balance. Other oversimplifications such as increasing the oxygen content of the blood to kill cancer has led patients to seek hyperbaric oxygen treatment. Most cancers are bad at making blood vessels that supply oxygen, which limits their growth. Increasing oxygen to a tumor will PROMOTE cancer growth.

Importantly, some older, ineffective attempts to treat cancer that have long since been abandoned have been readopted by “Cancer Treatment Clinics”. This has led to a reappearance of such treatments as hyperthermia, coffee enemas, colon cleansing, purging and laetrile. The hyperthermia unit at MD Anderson was disbanded in the 1980’s after it was found to be ineffective yet the procedure is still being done in clinics in Mexico. Coffee enemas and colon cleansing has never been demonstrated to be useful, same for Laetrile. Laetrile, which is an organic cyanide derived from peach pits, was studied in clinical trial at MD Anderson Cancer Center as well. The trials were stopped early because there were more deaths in the group of patients receiving the drug due to cyanide poisoning.

There are many other myths that have been propagated over the Internet and been taken at face value by unsuspecting individuals. Before making decisions or lifestyle changes, people should seek information from credible sources such as the National Institute of Health or a medical practitioner.

Robert Kilbourn, MD, PhD

San Juan Cancer Center at Montrose Memorial Hospital